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Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

Halal Food Conference

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Report Highlights:

The first international Halal food symposium of its kind was organized by the Export Development Center (EDC) of the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce (COSCC), September 24-25, 2001 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

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An International Conference on Halal (Permissible) Food Products September 24-25, 2001, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

General:

The first international Halal food symposium of its kind was organized by the Export Development Center (EDC) of the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce (COSCC), September 24-25, 2001 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. EDC collaborated with the King Saud University, Promosalons International, and the Saudi Arabian Standards Organization (SASO) in organizing the event. In conjunction with Halal conference, the EDC organized a Saudi Halal food exposition from September 24-27, 2001 in which about 15 Saudi food processors exhibited their products.

Definition of Halal:

In general, Halal is a term used to define those articles, foods, items, commodities, products, animals, consumables, etc, that are permissible and lawful for Muslims to eat, drink and/or use. In food, the term Halal is strictly used to describe food products, ingredients and food contact materials allowed by Islamic diet regulations.

Participants:

Even though, the organizers expected 600-1000 food specialists, buyers and journalist from more than 40 countries to attend the conference, only about 150 participants from Saudi Arabia, U.A.E., Tunisia, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, U.S.A., France, Australia, Singapore, and South Africa attended (with most participants coming from the host country). Per the symposium organizers, representatives from 400 international food companies cancelled their trip to Saudi Arabia following the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington for fear of more violence in the Middle East. Several international journalists were also unable to attend the seminar.

Registration Fees:

With the exception of invited guests and speakers at the symposium, attendees were charged registration fees of \$700 for per person for individual attendees and \$650 per person for group registrations.

Objectives of the Halal Symposium:

There were at least four objectives for the conference:

1. To promote food stuffs produced in Saudi Arabia as unquestionable Halal foods, produced under stringent Sharia law, with the aim of enhancing exports to Muslims all over the world.
2. To discuss various Halal standards currently used by several Muslim countries and explore the

possibilities of harmonizing them to come up with a single globally recognized and acceptable Halal standards and specifications as well as presenting Halal food as a healthy choice for all.

3. To discuss various international initiatives regarding the certification of Halal foods and attempt to harmonize those certification programs to create globally acceptable rules and regulations for issuing Halal food certificates which will eventually lead to the creation of a Halal food label and a single internationally recognized Halal logo.
4. To create an awareness of the need for Halal food standardization.
5. Promotion of the Saudi Halal food industry.

Topics discussed at the conference:

- └ Saudi Arabian (Halal) standard and certification.
- └ Halal food and HACCP.
- └ Assessment of Global Demand for Halal products: cross cultural, cross national prospective.
- └ Halal and HACCP food safety approach in food manufacturing.
- └ International Specification and Standard of Halal food.
- └ Critical points in Halal food production and modern production.
- └ Halal and Tayyeb the new comprehensive standard.
- └ Halal prospective for the international market.
- └ Halal food present and prospective markets.
- └ Food Trade among countries of the Islamic Conference Organization.
- └ Halal certification for local and international markets.
- └ Halal and Tayyeb: the SGS role.

- L** Saudi Arabian Standard organization (SASO) role in Halal food.
- L** Procedures in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for food product import and export.
- L** Halal Slaughtering projects.
- L** Industries and support services for food industry in Saudi Arabia.
- L** Procedures and conditions for obtaining loans to import Saudi products.

Recommendations:

The Halal Food Conference at its conclusion has recommended that:

- N** A clear cut and definite concept of Halal food and a well-defined formula to be practiced both locally and internationally. The concept of Halal food products and its nutritional value should be made clear and the present and future demands of Halal food should be studied and disseminated.
- N** Saudi Export Promotion Center (EPC) of the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce and industry set up a specialized division to study different Halal standards presented at the conference and work on integrate them in order to promote the Halal food industry globally.
- N** A specialized agency be set up at EPC in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia to study the production and marketing of Halal food products and recommended the proposed division be based at Export Promotion Center of the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce and industry in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Also a specialized journal or periodical should be issued to take up topics related to Halal food products, with regard to their production and distribution.
- N** A global logo for Halal Food Products be designed and necessary measures taken for its promotion and circulation. The Halal logo must be distinguished from other logos.
- N** The Saudi Arabian Standards Organization (SASO) continues with its efforts to come up with a draft internationally acceptable Halal foods standard. According to SASO, the draft standard will meet the WTO requirements dealing with TBT and SPS agreements. SASO disclosed that the draft Halal foods requirements will adopt the Codex

Alimentarius Commission Guidelines No. 24 issued in 1997. Per information provided by SASO, the Codex Guidelines No. 24 deals with the general guidelines on using the word "Halal" in foodstuffs. Included in the SASO draft standard will be the selection of a Halal food logo to be affixed on labels of Halal foods and rules and regulations for granting such logo to national and international food processors. SASO hopes that its new Halal standards when issued would be eventually harmonized with other Halal food specifications to set a single Halal standard worldwide for the promotion of Halal food exports.

N The food processing plants and companies be urged to apply Halal food standards and specifications on global basis and the benefits both to consumers and traders be pointed out to boost the demand for Halal food and opening new international markets for the products.

N The industries and services which support the concept of Halal food products encouraged to expand their imports and exports potentials in the interest of producers and consumers alike.

N EPC opened up communication channels with all international scientific organizations and bodies interested in good quality of food products to spread awareness for wholesomeness of Halal food products and encourage application of standards and specifications.

N Agreed to organize similar international meeting annually on a regular basis.

END OF REPORT